

Washington, DC - 12th District Georgia Congressman John Barrow (D-Savannah) this week sent a letter to Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns urging him to expand the research role and mission of the Southeast Research and Education Center in Midville.

"The 719-acre station and its 26 research projects are important assets to the farmers in the sandy Coastal Plain soils which dominate Eastern Georgia and much of the state's 12th Congressional District," Barrow wrote. "The research currently being conducted at the Center is critical to local farmers across eastern Georgia, many of whom are actively pursuing value-added diversity in their crop mixture, and are seriously exploring how they can participate in helping this country become more energy independent."

Last night, representatives from Congressman Barrow's office joined with over 80 local farmers at a meeting in Midville to discuss a proposal by Dean Scott Angle of the University of Georgia's College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences to sell off underused land at the center. The revenue from the sale would be reinvested to help finance an expansion of the Center's research capacity.

Barrow, who is a member of the House Agriculture Committee, expressed his support for Angle's efforts in his letter to Secretary Johanns. However, he urged Johanns and Dr. Gale Buchanan -- former Dean of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences at UGA, and current Under Secretary of Research, Education, and Economics at the USDA -- to work closely with the University of Georgia Extension Service to find expanded research opportunities for the Center. Copied on the letter were House Agriculture Committee Chair Collin Peterson, and House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture Chair Rosa DeLauro:

January 30, 2007

Hon. Mike Johanns

Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture

1400 Independence Ave., S.W.

Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Johanns:

I'm writing today concerning the Southeast Research and Education Center, located near Midville, Georgia. The 719-acre station and its 26 research projects are important assets to the farmers in the sandy Coastal Plain soils which dominate Eastern Georgia and much of the state's 12th Congressional District.

The Southeast Research and Education Center was established in 1952 to boost the area's depressed rural economy after World War II. The site was chosen because its low rainfall and high heat index could test plants and animals under extreme conditions. The station originally included just 468 acres and operated an extensive livestock farm, including a dairy, layer houses, beef cattle and swine units. In addition, the Center planted peaches, blueberries, vegetables, cotton, and other row crops that could demonstrate to farmers the economic efficiency of diversity on the farm.

Research at the center is geared to a long, 240-day growing season in the region that has the lowest average rainfall in the state. As such, this station provides the only environment to test the drought and pest resistance of crop varieties under the conditions that prevail throughout this part of Georgia. The station features a beautiful 27-acre irrigated pecan orchard, and an important community asset consisting of an extraordinary auditorium that can be used for educational and community events.

Importantly, some of the state's first and most extensive cotton research was conducted at this station. As just one example, the first traps for the boll weevil eradication program were originally tested here.

In 1992, the station added another 251 acres and today features primarily research on row crops, insect pest and disease control, and plant variety evaluations on small grains, canola, peanuts, cotton, corn, and soybeans.

The research currently being conducted at the Center is critical to local farmers across eastern Georgia, many of whom are actively pursuing value-added diversity in their crop mixture, and are seriously exploring how they can participate in helping this country become more energy independent.

Dean Scott Angle, of the University of Georgia's College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, has met with area producers and come up with a plan to augment the station's mission, and secure a more stable funding base to encourage further growth in research projects and community services. I heartedly applaud his creative and innovative efforts.

I ask that you and your staff, including Undersecretary for Research, Education and Economics and former UGA Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Dean, Dr. Gale Buchanan, work closely with me and my colleagues on the House Agriculture Committee to find expanded, reinvigorated, and directed research projects to be based at the Midville facility. Increased research at this site will benefit not only the producers of the 12th District, but, as has been shown by past research efforts at the site, the entire nation's food, fiber, and renewable fuel producers.

Thank you for your attention to this pressing matter, and I look forward to working closely with you during the upcoming farm bill negotiations.

Sincerely,

John Barrow

CC:

Hon. Collin Peterson; Chair, House Agriculture Committee

Hon. Rosa DeLauro; Chair, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture

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